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[Fuel for the Future: Nutrition Tips for Each Stage in a Man's Life](#)

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By Lieutenant Michael Kantar, U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Clinical Dietitian



FOSTER, Okinawa (May 20,
2016) United States Naval
Hospital Okinawa, Japan
Clinical Dietitian Lieutenant
Michael Kantar
discusses nutrition with a Sailor
in the hospital galley. (U.S.
Navy photo
by Joe Andes, U.S. Naval
Hospital Okinawa, Japan Public
Affairs Officer)

Diet and nutrition are key elements in a man's health all throughout his life. Each stage in life has its own nutritional requirements needed to keep the body running in peak form. Proper nutrition and eating right at every age will help men sail through the decades feeling great. Here are a few quick dietary tips for each stage in a man's life:**Nutrition in your Twenties**

Life's great at this time, you're either just enlisted or you've been in for a few years and you're beginning to find your groove as you experience the world. Your body is able to handle many social, environmental, and physical stressors that your older counterparts may not be able to. Similarly, you also have the mentality of "I can eat anything and burn it off immediately". For a majority of your twenties, this might be the case. However, just because you can "burn it off" doesn't mean that you are nourishing your body with the best fuel for it.

In your twenties you want to keep your body energized with healthy meals and snacks which include a variety of grains (white and whole wheat), vegetables (starchy and non-starchy), fruits (fresh, dried, or frozen), dairy (milk, yogurt, cheeses), proteins (animal and plant based sources), and fats (oils, nut/seed butters, butter, salad dressings) which meet energy needs and promote a healthy weight.

While you may not be thinking about your long-term health prospects at this stage in your life, keep in mind that it is never too early to start eating healthy. Implementing a proper diet and nutrition plan in your twenties and maintaining it as you age will greatly benefit you as you age.

Eating Right in your Thirties

When you hit your thirties, life continues to be fun, but things can get complicated. Many men will get married or start a family. Increased work responsibilities and longer hours can keep you from the gym. You may not be as active as you were in your twenties. Unlike your activity level, your appetite may not diminish. This can lead to weight gain unless you alter your eating habits. Don't skip meals or eat a few very large meals. Try to plan out your meals for the day. Ensure that you have balanced and consistent meals every four to five hours. If meals cannot be had within a four to five hour window, then it is important to consider having snacks which are calorie controlled and include some form of fruit or vegetable.

Diet Concerns in your Forties

If you did not prioritize your health and nutrition in your twenties and thirties, this is the decade when chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes often rear their heads. There are a few nutrients which can protect you from onset of these diseases including fiber and Vitamin D.

Fiber from whole foods (not from over-the-counter supplements) acts like a sponge in your

gastrointestinal tract. It stabilizes your blood sugar by absorbing bad LDL cholesterol and helps provide you with a sense of fullness which can prevent excessive weight gain. The average American consumes fourteen to fifteen grams of fiber per day. The national recommendation for any male is to attain at least twenty five to thirty five grams per day, so look for foods rich in fiber such as 100% whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and beans. This will increase your intake of this nutrient.

Vitamin D, also known as the “sunshine vitamin”, is critical to ensuring a healthy skeleton and some research has shown that it can enhance your immune function. Unlike fiber, which is found in a number of different foods, vitamin D is a nutrient which is not as widely available in the foods we eat. Some foods containing vitamin D include fortified milks, grains, orange juices, margarines, some fish (such as salmon, herring, mackerel, and tuna), and egg yolks. The best source of vitamin D is sunshine. Exposing your skin to five to fifteen minutes of sun each day (depending on your skin tone and the angle of the sun in the area you are living) ensures that your body can make vitamin D by converting certain compounds in your system to the vitamin. If you feel that you are not getting adequate amounts of vitamin D you can ask your doctor about testing to determine if you need supplementation.



160520-N-TC859-14 CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa (May 20, 2016) United States Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Clinical Dietitian Lieutenant Michael Kantar aims to keep the fleet fit to fight. In addition to providing nutrition counseling and advice to patients at the hospital, Kantar provides nutrition briefings and classes to Sailors and Marines in the fleet. (U.S. Navy photo by Joe Andes, U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Public Affairs Officer)

Nutrition Focus for your Fifties

Disease management and control is the primary focus for those who have not taken care of themselves throughout their prior decades of life. If you have and are in good health, maintaining that healthy lifestyle and diet is the key to a continued healthful life.

In this decade, focus on foods which provide antioxidants. These are compounds within foods that help

neutralize harmful bi-products that form in your system from environmental and chemical exposures and can contribute to chronic disease onset. When you think of antioxidant-rich foods, think of any foods which end in “erry”. Blueberries, strawberries, cranberries and raspberries contain antioxidants. Other colorful plant foods do too.

At this age, if you have high cholesterol or high triglycerides, it is essential to cut back on things containing added sugars and added fat as these have been associated with increasing the levels of fats in your blood. If you do develop a craving for sweets, think about reaching for a small piece (2"x2" square) of dark chocolate containing 70% or more cocoa.

Finally, because as you age the digestive process becomes less efficient, make sure to consume an adequate amount of vitamin B12. It is essential as a deficiency in this nutrient can lead to anemia. The best sources for this vitamin are animal-based proteins. There are also many grains which are fortified with this nutrient so pay mind to the types of food you are eating to ensure you obtain an adequate amount of this nutrient.

Entering your Sixties, Seventies and Beyond

If you continued to disregard your health and overall nutrition until now, then the ramifications will definitely begin to rear their ugly head at this point in your life. The focus during your sixties and beyond is similar to what it was in your fifties; disease prevention. You want to be eating the same antioxidant-rich, fiber laden foods that you did in your forties and fifties. Some foods to consider in your arsenal to combat disease include eggs and leafy vegetables. They're rich in lutein and zeaxanthin which can help prevent age-related macular degeneration.

Also in your 60's muscular degeneration, also known as sarcopenia, is a concern. Therefore it's important to have some form of protein rich foods (salmon and tuna, beans and peas, nuts/seeds, eggs, lean cuts of pork, beef, or chicken) which are lean and have minimal amounts of solid fats.

It is very rare to develop a nutrition or lifestyle condition overnight. It often takes a series of weeks, months, and even years for a health condition to arise. Educating yourself about nutrition and developing healthy eating habits when you are young will pay off down the road. Also, it's never too late to change a component of your diet, meal time habits, or lifestyle. Just keep in mind that change is progressive and should never be done all at once. In parallel, making a “poor nutrition” choice at a meal or snack is not going to derail you from ascertaining your goals.

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